1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

tants and their customs than the average Amhara.

Thus, the officials with whom the average Amhara has to deal are the headman (cheqa shum), the district tax-collector, the thiefcather-in white, and the judge of the nearest market town; also, the priest and/or new, young teacher of written Amharic and arithmetic for the first and second grade. Very often, the governor, who is usually a former feudal lord himself, may grant the posts of district chief (worāda shum) and lieutenant (mislanē) to the lower nobility, or their sons; while they in turn draw on their loyal retainers for the more local jobs of headman and thiefcatcher-in-white. In this manner the former feudal structure of human relationships is retained in the old Amhara provinces, despite the official breakup of the system at the top levels. The former feudal chief may even still be addressed by his old title, which has been officially transformed from a military to a civilian significance, but he is still the "telleq sāw" ("great man" and conservative pacesetter.

This pattern of residential kin-hamlets and feudal relationships changes only in the urban centers which grow out of permanent market spots. The market area is usually located on a little hill, called "arada". Soon a church is built there, and a public area below the hill is cleared of bush to serve as a camping place for caravans, and as a race course for the young Amharas' horse games on Christmas, Epiphany and other feast days. On the hill, the district chief or governor builds his "palace", with a large courtyard for his retainers and office-seekers. The local judges gradually graduate from their table-beneath-the-cy-

443 press to more permanent quarters. Arabs set up more perma-
369 nent stalls at the market. Girls "between marriages" set up their "hotel services" in makeshift shacks, featuring an imported double bed, and foods like the housewife makes at home, including daily fresh beer. A bizarre variety of trade goods pours in, of foreign or domestic origin. Finally, the government sets up an elementary school-- the most recent development, usually post-1942.

B. Shelter: The Amhara Hut.

342 The Amhara circular hut of wattle and daub, with its overhanging roof to carry off the rains, is called "tuqul" (now more often "sar byet", i.e. thatched house; in some districts, "gojo"). It does not differ basically from the typical habitation of the Cushitic-speaking Galla, of cen-
[84] tral Ethiopia. But further south several distinctly different types are encountered, following ethno-linguistic and tribal lines.

The "tuqul" may contain one room or two, through an interior separation or special elevation. It usually houses both the biological family of procreation and their more important livestock which are brought in at night for fear of hyenas. Tuquls in more elaborate hamlets include special storage tuquls, a kitchen tuqul, and even a guest tuqul which may double as extra storage space for the largest beer jars. During the rainy season, when temperatures, especially at night, drop considerably, the family huddles closely around the central fireplace inside the tuqul, and in that 3-month season the tuqul can be considered overcrow-

323 harvest in the first month. Cash income from this occupation in the case of a diligent craftswoman can amount to Eth$50.-per year, which means at least 50 large beer jugs or at least 150 smaller kitchen pottery. Such a craftswoman is called "antäränya" or the general term for craftsman, "kayla" (which, however, is often considered an insult). She may be freed from other labors, particularly spinning, in her own household. But in general she considers it a sideline, for some cash income, or to please the landlord by supplying his household and tenants with pottery at very low prices.

323 443 Most Falasha craftswomen do not like to sell on the big market, despite the much better prices there. The reason they give is that they may face insults during the usual dickering that precedes purchase, and also that they do not wish to arouse the envy of their Coptic Amhara neighbors by accumulating wealth. Another reason is that the big markets take place invariably on Saturday, on which day the Sabbath-observing Falashas cannot go to market or trade, and the Muslim middleman would absorb the extra profit that comes from trading at the market. However, Falasha men do follow the latter alternative with their plowpoints.

323 This disinterest of Falasha craftswomen in developing their economic potentials has led to conservatism in regard to modern change. Though very curious about European pottery brought in the Italian occupation, particularly about shape and glazing, they did not adopt European methods, partly because of technical limitation of power and fuel as well as techniques, partly for the

326 523 [443] Another difficulty is that the Falasha, observing Sabbath on Saturday when the big markets are in operation, cannot market any surplus of iron products directly, even if they wanted to, and must use a middleman, usually a Muslim, who absorbs any extra profit that might accrue in town. Thus the economic significance of their craft remains entirely in the old pattern, and is not developing in a modern direction, which it might have as a result of recent Western contact, stimulation and tools. The Falasha are recasting every part of their own rifles except the barrel, and their womenfolk have attempted to make glass out of sand (with little success) and modern Yemenite clay incense burners (with more success).

C. Carpentry.

322 Carpentry has already been characterized as minimal, incidental, merely semi-occupational among the Amhara, and as a tangential task of the ironsmith toolmaker. At best, the carpenter ("tarabi") is a part-time specialist.

The riflestock, of wanza wood, made by the ironsmith, often leads to his being asked to do other special woodwork, e.g. saddlemaking. If he becomes proficient in it, he may do nothing else during part of the year, and then send the finished, wooden saddle to the faqi tanners for a leather cover. For his own labor he may charge as much as Eth$8.- a better profit than that achieved by the average ironsmith. Wanza wood (Cordia abyssinica) is also used for the legs of the "alga" bed, so that the

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

464 632 happen and can be talked about. Here caravans arrive with all kinds of trade goods, and though the Amhara is not a trader in his culture pattern, he does hire on as transportation helper, and will have his own donkey carry some goods for sale.

443 There is a small daily market in each town. Where no town is near, one day a week a small rural market takes place (e.g. every Tuesday at Laqwamiya in the district of Seqelt) so that farmer and trader can meet Monday through Friday, at these markets set up at crossroads, in a grove of trees, or near a church center.

The big Saturday market takes place in a town terminal of caravan routes; nowadays at the end of an Italian road, also, e.g. at Golarba in Dembea, where Italian trente-quatro trucks carry imports and exports to Asmara, Eritrea, and the coast, while caravans carry goods from and to the Sudan. Gondar town is an older and bigger Saturday market. To these markets are brought surplus farm products. All routes lead to it, and the well-to-do ride there on mules, their servants beating out a road for them among pack donkeys and pedestrians. In return, Ethiopian retailers (often Muslim) sell goods bought from Arab wholesalers.

While there is some duplication of items of sale at these markets, the daily markets specialize in items used by or obtained from the household: fresh butter sold on a leaf, to put on the hair; melted butter for cooking in "wot"; red barbare pods of varying strength,

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

443 or green ones for "alecha" meat sauce; tyeff grain; imported and native spices; linseed and nug oil seeds; firewood; chickens; donkeys and sheep and goats, but no more expensive livestock. Approaching feasts, fasts and rainy season change the emphasis and variety of products and activities.

438 The big Saturday market emphasizes items of long-distance trade such as salt, from the lowland plain of Areho, in Danakil, bordering on French Somaliland. Bricks of this coarse-grained salt "Amolye" were formerly used as money, their value increasing with the distance from the place of origin. This has been gradually discontinued during the reign of the present Emperor, and salt is now also imported in crushed pebbles from the Sudan, called "Senar" after the area of origin. The big bar has become rare, is called "lemadaw", and costs from Eth$4.- for a big one to Eth 50¢ for a little one.

438 Coffee comes from Jimma. Raw cotton is sold by
439 weight, from the Matamma border of the Sudan, brought on camel back. Spices (e.g. abusda) and incense come from as far as Yemen. Razor blades come from England. Imports from the Sudan include much cotton cloth: "abujedid" for shirt-making, more expensive cotton "stock" material, and now also khaki cloth for shorts and modern bush jackets.

439 Import duty is high, as much as Eth$9.- per "ta-
[65] qa", about 45 meters. Some raw cotton is domestic, from the Setit market of the Wolkait jungle border. "Taqa"

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

439 some spices, English razorblades, sewing needles, safety pins, Lux soap in hotelroom size, laundry soap cake, [442] kerosene, etc. The wholesalers, usually Arabs, buy these [443] and sell them to Muslim Ethiopian retailers. Sometimes, in bigger towns, Arabs open regular stalls and even stores to sell these items daily, as well as special luxuries such as chocolate, hard candy, and products of the central Ethiopian government such as matches (a government monopoly), cigarettes for Muslims (also a government monopoly), school notebooks with the picture of the Emperor on the title page, pencils, imported readymade eyeglasses, etc. On their return trips the trente-quatro trucks are heavily laden with produce such as tyeff, nug, linseed, peas, beans, honey, sheepskins, cowhides, and in some areas musk from the civet cat, and coffee.

438 The purchases of the farmer consist in greater part of items from other areas of Ethiopia, notably, salt, coffee, spices, some of the raw cotton and matches. Much of this is still carried by traditional caravan, where no roads exist or where they have been washed out. Caravans form after the middle of the dry season, and return just before the rainy season, so that the farmer can stock up on staples.

435 To pay for these purchases and for some of the imported items such as razor blades, the farmer brings his produce, but prices fluctuate between seasons, with every arrival or departure of caravans (or trucks), and with distance. For example, 1 quintal (100 kilos) of

435 tyeff in Gondar brings as little as Eth$10.- but in Addis Ababa Eth$30.- and more. Nug seed bring as much as Eth$30. per 100 kilos even at the Gondar market, a rural production area. Gesho, hops, brings as much as Eth$1.- per kilo; some semi-urban farmers grow it as a parttime cash crop (also the drug plant "chat" chewed by Muslims). Other products sold by the farmer include honey, peas, beans, maize, sorghum, dagussa, spices, beeswax, chickens brought by farm women, and recently also eggs; milk, butter, livestock big and small, goat-gut ("jemat") for cordage and the "qrar" banjo. Big livestock (cows, oxen and mules) are traded only at big Saturday markets, also the fat-tailed sheep or old cow for the Sunday dinner. At the end of long fasts edible livestock is in much demand and prices may double. It is also noteworthy that despite the poor roads, modern truck transportation is so efficient economically in comparison with traditional caravans, that prices for comparable imported and long-distance domestic products are on the same scale at the big Saturday markets.

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443 [492] The big market is also an important governmental administrative center, especially the judicial organization. From ancient times this has been the location of the formally appointed judge, the "dayna", to arbitrate disputes that the curbstone judge has not settled, and to hear cases against accused thieves. Here the governor's trade chief, the "nägad-ras", acts as collector of revenue and supervisor of trade practices. He fixes and alters tolls on trails and river crossings,

443 651

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

and observes the travelling traders, the "mangadanna". Both chiefs, especially the danya, sit under broad, shady trees on the market. Nearby is the gibbet, from which criminals were publicly hung until less than a decade ago. Recent additions to the market scene include a few modern tables and chairs at which treasury clerks from Addis Ababa receive import and other duties; and, within a barbed wire fence, government "dressers" of the health department from time to time, especially in epidemics, give free typhus and other injections to anyone applying and diagnosed sick.

Trade practices of the Amhara differ from much of the Middle East, especially from the Arab. The Amhara is too proud to badger a customer, and the profit motive is not as storng--he is not concerned with financial gain. The Amhara is not concerned at monetary loss in a trade transaction but his temper is aroused if he fears that he has been bettered, outwitted and made the laughing stock of others. If he has sold to a foreigner at only a little above the usual price instead of double or triple, his competitors at the market will jeer at him. In this case he will try to undo the trade, claiming linguistic misunderstanding.

As a result of this fear of being shamed, producers of native articles will not bring manufactured goods to market unless they have a previous firm order, after which the customer has to wait. It is craftsman's trade rather than commercial. This is even true of members of ethnic low-class producers, tanners, saddlemakers, smiths,

437 If bettered in trade, he will try to even the score, both in his heart and before his peers, with veiled insults within hearing of the other party, such as "my mother was not a pottery-maker", alluding to the low-class origin of the seller who has charged too high a price.

Housewives shopping at the market are conscious of "nuisance value". Before going home, if it is early, they loiter at the stall of the Arab merchant toying with the displayed merchandise while he nervously watches, until he gives them little gifts so that they go away, "ayn mamalasha" (lit. turning the eye away, i.e. homeward). The young women receive this with glee at having outwitted the shrewd Arab, and dance away.

When two Amhara have concluded an agreement, they touch each other's outstretched palms while standing very close to each other, and, in the presence of witnesses, swear "Haile Selassye yemut" (lit. may the emperor die, i.e. if the swearer breaks his agreement). This procedure is not followed in little transactions, but in the case of major livestock, because of the family and other social significance.

443 177 The Saturday market in a long-settled town ("qedamye gabaya") has long been the entrance gate for diffusion of foreign goods, ideas, and ethnic groups. The Muslim mosque is usually very close, even at the edge, its minaret overshadowing the market. The teahouses, "shay byet" are of longtime, Arab introduction, usually operated by Ethiopian Muslims who import the tea and know how to prepare Arab delicacies. It is patronized by Arab whole-

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

443 177 salers, and other Muslim retailers. Here they discuss caravan trade, import and export, and local business. These Arabs speak enough Amharic for their purposes, but cannot read or write it, so that they employ temporary services of Amhara clerks, graduates or upper classmen of elementary schools, to translate and write documents relating to transactions, taxes and loans. It is these Arab traders who constitute most of the customers of provincial branches of the new State Bank of Ethiopia. Only rarely does a foreign company like Besse have a local branch, operated by East Indian managers. This is recent, while the Arab traders are the successors of former Arab slavetraders, an ancient but now abolished occupation in Ethiopia. Arab traders also serve as personal bankers to Amhara.

The broker, "mäden", may be an Amhara. This is especially true if he is the aforementioned labor broker. He acts as negotiator for business transactions, and (e.g. in the sale of major livestock) personally guarantees that the object sold was not stolen; he is required to make good the loss if it is not so. This is an important form of insurance, for which the broker may charge as little as 1%, payable usually in cash; he is also given a barley beer dinner after the transaction. He, in turn, may employ Amhara loiterers to gather around during transactions and contribute their wit to urge the buyer to close the deal.

563 443 554 The Muslim Ethiopian retailer, unlike the Arab trader, carries little prestige among Amhara. His com-

563 parative wealth may be envied, but his religion, and
443 his habit of taking several wives from ex-slave (Barya),
554 Sudanese, lowland females, places him on a level with the upper ethnic craftsmen class. The fact that his labor is not manual elevates him a bit. The full Arab from Yemen or Arabia is regarded as a foreigner, and there is little concern about him since he does not participate in the social hierarchy of the Coptic Amhara.

436 Silver coinage for major transactions, until recently, was the Maria Theresa Thaler, bearing the year 1780, even if coined much later, imported, and sometimes referred to as "machedo", sickle. The recent laws of the present emperor provide for confiscation and punishment for possession of this now illegal currency, but peasants and townsmen have them hidden and silversmiths can still obtain them with little difficulty. The habit of burying coins for safeKeeping has carried over to modern paper money. Every year cases of buried paper money that decayed in the rainy season become the talk of the town. The former MT Thaler was divided as follows:

1 MT Thaler = 16" temun" silver coins of Menelik; the term "temun" is now used for silver ornaments, though the new Ethiopian 25¢ piece is actually used in exchange, or even in ornaments.

= 16 "gresh", the Egyptian-Turkish piastre coined in 1899, no longer used, and rarely seen.

796 262 As soon as this is over, a period of intensive meat-eating begins, similar to European carne-vale (carnival), for the same reason: the long lenten period is approaching, and in Abyssinia this means also abstention from eggs, cheese, milk, and other animal products (some even avoid fish), just as on any Wednesday and Friday; and no food before noon, for the strictly observant. The fast is obeyed by nearly everyone, in all classes. This fast begins on the 22nd day of Yäkatit, and is called "kudade" (lit. suffering) to indicate both the suffering of Jesus and of the faster. It is also referred to as "arba tom"(lit. 40-fast) though in fact the fast lasts 55 days. Women prepare a variety of vegetable and grain dishes, to substitute for the absence of more solid food.

796 [[71]] Finally, on the 17th day of the month of Miyazya, the long-awaited Easter, "Fassika" (related to the Hebrew Passover, "Pasṣah" etymologically), occurs.

It is the climax of a week of preparations during which the lenten "hudadey" sharpens. This week is called "hemamat" (passion, extreme suffering), and no work is done, symbolizing the sympathy withthe weakness and suffering of Jesus. Even the Saturday market is cancelled--the only time this happens.

● [[43]] Purchasers of meat and supplies for Easter must do their shopping on Thursday, when a special big market is held. The price of sheep, etc., goes up sharply, even doubles, in anticipation of the feast. Even tyëff and pepper (bärbäre) become more expensive. Ethnic craftsmen take this opportunity to bring their products,

X 794 [798] tolerates it, as long as the residential location of the zar house is sufficiently beyond hearing distance of the church.

[562] Men are often ashamed to admit that they themselves are zar-possessed devotees. If possessed by a feminine zar, considered more stupid and ignorant than a male zar, in most cases, it is considered [782] possible to "outwit" her. A clever zar doctor may negotiate with a female zar to accept a consecrated hen, never to be slaughtered for her, merely to be looked at. The owner of the hen can then sell the eggs, and has a (totamically?) protected hen!

[787] More often, men consult zar doctors on business - though by stealth. In the town of Gondar, e.g., a man wishing to find a job for his nephew might present the problem to Lady Salamtew, who would listen quietly, accept his "frankincense money", and tell him to return on a certain day for her advice.

X 794 782 443 The economic significance of the zar cult varies, but can be considerable especially in the provincial towns. Most zar spirits, especially the powerful and clever ones, like "generosity" in sacrifices, are pleased by voluptuousness, insist on healthy animals for sacrifice, neat gifts and attire of their "horses" (a woman who is a clotheshorse would certainly be regarded as possessed), incense that has been imported from Yemen, aromatic herbs, imported perfumes, European utensils and alcoholic beverages (distilled arrak). Retail traders know this and encourage women to buy "nice things for the zar". It is well known that many women are "struck" by the spirit for the first time just after having visited ("window shopped" in the modern equivalent) a big market. No wonder zar doctors are popular with the Muslim Ethiopian retail traders, who not infrequently let them take some fancied item without payment, as a sort of silent commission

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

312 the downward side but is sloped on the up-hill side and therefore triangular in section. The filling-up of the empty space behind the wall, to the new terrace level, may be partly accomplished by hand but tends to be left to nature. During the rains, especially on the steeper slopes, there is a continuous downward movement of soil, which is arrested by the terrace walls and the pockets above them gradually fill up. In the course of centuries an immense amount of simple terracing of this kind has been done, the effect being to accentuate the existing irregularities of the steeper slopes. The landscape has certainly been greatly modified in this way, but it is often impossible to tell at first sight whether a given feature is natural, or partly or wholly due to terracing. It is obvious that such terracing has not only provided additional acreage for agriculture but also served the useful purpose of saving many steep slopes from excessive erosion. In several parts of Ethiopia, including this area, I have seen slopes under cultivation which were so steep that the soil, when loosened and disturbed, would slide away downhill. At first sight one would suppose that such slopes must be completely denuded after a few seasons' rain. The fact that this does not happen is due, I believe, to the vast abundance of stones in these soils, every one of which acts as a minute barrier arresting the flow of water and silt. Nevertheless such slopes, unless terraced, clearly cannot survive indefinitely under cultivation.

443 [487] Surplus produce is brought in to the big weekly market at Debra Berhan which is both the commercial and the social centre of the whole district; all the main routes radiate from it. Every Saturday morning these routes are thronged with market-goers, who can be seen moving along in an almost continuous stream, the well-to-do mounted on mules, the majority on foot, some driving laden donkeys and pack-mules. The products of this countryside are few, and there is little food surplus, but some wheat and barley come to market, also eggs and chickens and a good deal of butter. Some honey (used in making the local mead or *tej*) comes in, and beeswax is collected for export. Firewood, a scarce commodity on the plateau, is carried in in quantity. *Gesho*, the fermenting agent, comes up from the gorges. There is plenty of earthenware, made on the plateau nearby. From the district of Menz to the north come excellent felt blankets and burnouses. Traders from farther afield bring salt from the desert, partly in the bars which used formerly to pass as currency, and raw cotton and spices from the eastern plains. Textiles and other imported goods now find their way to this market by lorry.

When, in the course of the afternoon, the market crowds begin to stream homewards, one may identify the few simple wares they have bought or bartered. Some have a bag or a bar of salt, some raw cotton for spinning or a piece of cotton cloth, some a fresh supply of coffee-beans, some a bottle of kerosene or a cake of soap. Many have acquired earthenware water-pots or [323] cooking vessels; the large round platters (*matad*) 18 inches across, on which [482] the local bread is baked, stand out conspicuously for they are always carried, for safety, on the head.

771 It still remains to describe the most potent of the influences which shape the life of the country-bred Amhara—that of the Church. The priests, of

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

business of petitions, and few are without wives. This 621
causes many single women to live here, and when they are 443
old they have another resource, for in this town every Tues-
day there is a great market or fair at which three or four
hundred persons are brought together; and all the old
women and some young ones have measures to measure
wheat and salt, and they go to the market to measure and
gain their living; they give hospitality to those that sleep
there that day, and also take care for them of what remains
to be sold for the next market day. There is another 595
reason why there are many women in this town, it is 688
because the men who have plenty of food to eat keep two
or three wives; and this is not forbidden to them by the
King nor by their magistrates, only by the Church. Every
man who has more than one wife does not enter the church,
nor does he receive any sacrament: and they hold him to
be excommunicated. For a year and a half a nephew of
mine and I lodged in the house of a man named Ababitay,
and he had three wives still alive and acquaintances of ours,
friends in honourable friendship: they said that he had
had seven wives and thirty children of them. Nobody for-
bade them, except the Church, as has been said, which did
not give them the benefit of the sacraments; and before our
departure, he put away from him, and from intercourse
with him, two wives, and remained with one, that is to say,
the one he had last, who was the youngest, and already they
gave him the sacraments, and he entered the church like
anybody else, and as though he had not had more than one
wife. On this account there are many women in this town,
because the men are well off and are like courtiers: and they
take two or three, or more if it pleases them. In this [586]
country marriages are not fixed, because they separate for
any cause. I saw people married, and was at a marriage 585
which was not in a church, and it was done in this manner.
On the open space before some houses they placed a bed-

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

an ouquia. This Barnagais forbade the people in his country having any other weights except his own, and they had to ask the Barnagais or his factors for the weights whenever they had to sell or receive gold, so that he had knowledge of what was in the country, and he takes it when he pleases, according to what his country people say, who must know it well. 436

CAP. XXIX.—*Of the church of the town of Barra, and its ornaments, and of the fair there, and of the merchandise, and costumes of the friars, nuns, and priests.*

In this town of Barra there is a church of Our Lady, large, new, very well painted and well built, and handsomely ornamented with many brocades, crimson silks, and Mekkah velvets, and red camlets. The church in this town is served like that at Barua, only that the offices are more solemnized because the Barnagais resides here, and because here there are more clergy and an infinite number of friars. The church is managed by priests. I saw them make a procession round the church in the greater circuit, which is of the churchyard. In it there were many priests, friars, and men and women, because in this church the women receive the communion in the place where the laity do so. In that procession I saw the ornaments which I have mentioned: they must have taken quite thirty turns round the church chaunting like a litany, and sounding many drums and cymbals, as they sound them when they make a procession before the effigy of Our Lady on Sundays and feast days; and they sing and celebrate a feast; and likewise when they give the communion on feast days. They said that this procession was made in supplication to God for rain for their sowing. The bells are of stone, like those of other churches, and the bells badly made. In this town there is a great fair like that of Barua, and so likewise in all the 346 796 443

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

443 places which are chief towns of districts, every week. The fairs consist of bartering one thing for another, as for instance, an ass for a cow, and that which is of least value gives to the other two or three measures of bread. By means of bread they buy stuffs, and with stuffs they buy mules and cows, and whatever they want, for salt, incense, pepper, myrrh, camphor, and other small articles.[1] They buy fowls and capons, and whatever they need or want to buy is all to be found at these fairs in exchange for others, for there is no current money. The principal merchants 792 292 at these fairs are priests, friars, and nuns. The friars are decent in their habits, which are full, and reaching to the ground. Some wear yellow habits of coarse cotton stuff, others habits of tanned goat skins like wide breeches,[2] also yellow. The nuns also wear the same habits; the friars wear, besides, capes of the fashion of Dominican friars, of the same yellow skins or stuffs, they wear hats; and the nuns wear neither capes nor hats, but [302] only the habit, and are shaven with a razor; and they wear a leather strap wound or fastened round the head. When they are old women they wear fillets[3] round their heads over their tonsures. These nuns are not cloistered, nor do they live together in convents, but in villages, and in the monasteries of the friars, on account of belonging to those houses and order. The order is all one, and the nuns give obedience where they receive their habits. With regard to entering churches and monasteries, the nuns do not enter except as other women do. There is a great multitude of nuns, as well as of friars; they say that some of them are 793 very holy women, and others are not so. The priests show very 302 little difference from the laity in their dress, because all [292] wear a good cloth wrapped round, like smart men, and their difference is that they carry a cross in their hand, and are shaven, and the laity wear long hair. The priests also have

[1] *Rechugavias.* [2] *Zafoens* or *Safoens.* [3] *Tufas.*

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

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FIG. 9.—*The weekly market*

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FIG. 10.—*The market: weighing cotton*

[P.46-B]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

impressions conveyed by much of the literature on Ethiopia, is not a normal ecological unit in Amhara society.

Each homestead gives the appearance of self-sufficiency and autonomy, but it is bound to a wider social context in a number of ways. While satisfying most of its consumption needs by its own efforts, every household depends on the market for certain items. The highland peasants must go to market for their chili, onions, peppers, hops, and cotton; while lowland peasants must barter for barley and sheep there. Salt and foreign fabrics must be imported from afar, and iron and clay products must be bought from specialists who bring their wares. Limited needs for currency—chiefly for rifles and, since 1942, taxes—are also met at the market.

The markets normally are held once a week. Every homestead is within walking distance of at least one market; though often the trip may take several hours, at times the greater part of a day. Markets in the same region are often scheduled on different days, so that, for example, the family which misses the one five hours to the north on Saturday can catch another four hours to the south on Tuesday. The virtual absence of roads throughout the countryside makes travel to market slow and tedious, but wealthier peasants nonetheless manage to transport quantities of grain and livestock to the provincial capitals for better prices and a wider selection of consumers' goods.

The household is linked to a wider world politically as well as economically. By providing tithes, revenues, military service, and corvée labor, the peasant has traditionally been obliged to support an extensive political hierarchy. In return for this he has received an organization for defending the country against enemies, and a structure of legitimate authority sufficient to maintain order and settle disputes.

The peasant's relations with this political hierarchy have been mediated by the office of *chĭqā shum*, a district headman. This office is circulated, usually annually, among a small number of men whose eligibility is based on their ownership of certain pieces of land. As the land passes from father to son, so does the eligibility for being *chĭqā shum*.

Traditionally the *chĭqā shum* was a role of considerable importance. It carried the duties of tax collection, adjudication, promulgation of official decrees, supervision of occasional work projects, levying of men for military service, and officiating at civil marriages and divorces. Through his work the *chĭqā shum* received a variety of fees and bribes. In cases of flagrant misbehavior the local people were able to dismiss him from office. The reorganization of provincial administration since 1942 has deprived the *chĭqā shum* of many of his former powers, but the office still exists and plays a modest role in peasant life.

The district over which a *chĭqā shum* has authority is the closest thing to a village unit among the Amhara. It is usually coterminous with the area sur-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

games with sticks and cloth, or wooden, balls. The adult males may do odd jobs around home, such as loading and moving bags of grain, or repairing farm equipment. But they are likely to gather at some convenient spot, perhaps at a boundary between fields, and discuss land disputes, arrange marriages, reconcile quarrels, or tell stories.

The daily activity of the Amhara peasant is somber and severe. It is guided by the constant awareness that one must provide for oneself everything he needs in this world. His is a life of deadening exertion, devoid of casual gaiety. Even in his diversions the mood is generally serious and tense.

One of the Amhara peasant's principal diversions is litigation. On days when heavy labor is forbidden the judge's yard is filled; nor is it ever empty on work days. Some peasants spend as much as twenty to twenty-five per cent of their waking days at court. (Because of its importance in Amhara culture, litigation will be discussed at greater length in later chapters.)

Going to market is another diversion. The trip is made by the peasant or his wife, or both, according to the needs of the household. The wife usually is responsible for transactions dealing with cooking equipment and spices, the husband for animals and farm equipment, while either is competent to negotiate about the great common denominator of Amhara life—grain. Exchanges are made either by barter or currency, which in olden times consisted of salt bars, pepper, and iron, as well as silver.

The market provides an occasion for seeing distant relatives and friends, catching up on the latest news of the area, and generally countering the normal isolation of the peasant's life. It is especially stimulating for children, who may be treated to a piece of sugar cane if they are lucky. But the marketgoers are less absorbed with being sociable than they are with the serious business of locating the items they lack, haggling over the terms of exchange, and getting on the trail in time to arrive home before dark.

Finally, the peasant's day may be devoted to one of the many celebrations that constitute the brightest moments in his life. Huge feasts are held on the occasion of weddings, christenings, and memorial anniversaries. Feasts and special festive activities mark the various religious holidays. Indeed, apart from the alternation of the rainy season (June-September) and the long dry season, and the related alternation of planting and harvesting the different crops, it is the cycle of holidays and weddings that defines the pattern of the Abyssinian year. Yet even these holidays have a fundamentally serious tone. Apart from the feasting, they are chiefly times for the veneration of sacred symbols and the real or symbolic letting out of aggression.

The Yearly Cycle

The new year falls on St. John's Day in September. For this occasion the floor of the peasant's home is strewn with freshly cut grass, tall and green after

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

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FIG. 11.—*The market: buying honey*

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FIG. 12.—*The market: inspecting pottery*

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FIG. 13.—*The market: selling salt bars*

[P.78-A]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

than those necessary to perform their jobs. They do not attempt to maintain and build personal libraries, though there are a few exceptions to this. The three small bookstores in Addis Ababa offer only the most insubstantial fare.

Nor, finally, have more than a handful of private individuals taken upon themselves the charge of a scholarly or literary calling. Although Marcel Cohen heralded the birth of a printed literature in Amharic as early as 1925,[88] writing is still not very important on the Ethiopian scene.* The output of original books and pamphlets in Amharic averaged less than fifteen a year over the past two decades. The presses and bookstores distribute Amharic publications indifferently at best. Much of the literary impetus produced by the desire of many Ethiopians to write, and the obvious need for good writing that would address itself to the intellectual demands of the present generation, has been sapped by economic, political, and cultural factors.

The economic factors include the high cost of printing; the diminutive market; and the absence of publishing houses. If an author wants to be read, he must normally pay for publication himself. Those who cannot must either find a patron in the Crown—frequently a highly lucrative arrangement—or resort to mimeographic duplication, or else remain unpublished. The censorship system and anxiety about spontaneous expression of any sort which has been fostered by prevailing political conditions constitute additional obstacles to literary development.

The paucity of serious writing has been the result no less of prevailing cultural conditions. The low intellectual level of his potential audience, the absence of channels for criticism, and the dearth of precedent make it difficult for the Ethiopian writer to determine good standards of writing. The confused state of Amharic, owing to regional variations and the absence of consensus on neologisms and loan words for expressing modern concepts, poses many problems on the level of sheer vocabulary. The temptation to get into print quickly, if the financial and political barriers can be hurdled, exceeds the temptation to work long and hard on an opus of quality. The desire to pontificate frequently eclipses the quest for understanding.

Those conditions which have inhibited the growth of Amharic literature—poverty, governmental reluctance to provide sufficient freedom and support, the newness of the modernizing culture, and the motivational level of the intellectuals themselves—may be viewed more broadly as responsible for the relative barrenness of Ethiopian intellectual life as a whole. Insofar as these conditions change in the coming decades, a radical change in the quality and organization of Ethiopian intellectual life may be expected. As a sociological

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* This is no longer due, however, to the negative attitude toward writing as such which was discussed in chapter iii. That traditional inhibition has been largely removed—primarily, it seems, by the postwar requirement that all legal accusations and court proceedings be set down in writing.

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779 their combined ranks the political elite of Ethiopia has been historically recruited. Third among the highland peoples are the Agaw. It appears likely that they are the descendants of the original Hamitic population of this region, and only during the last century have most Begemder Agaw been converted from their indigenous religious beliefs to membership in the Coptic Church. Within Begemder, they constitute a majority of the inhabitants of three non-contiguous areas. Fourth among highlanders are the rural Muslims, indigenous people who have been converted to Islam over the last five centuries.

[241] While the rural Amhara, Tigre, and Agaw are exclusively
[463] farmers, these Muslims divide their energies between farm-
[286] ing and working as artisans, mainly weavers of the toga
[443] cloth; Muslim women are prominant among the traders of
[562] the weekly markets held throughout the province. Least numerous of the highland people are the Falasha, Abyssin-
[423] ian Jews following a Mosaic creed. A despised and humil-
[326] iated people, the Falasha farm only rented fields
[286] (timene), and work as smiths as well as weavers; Falasha
[162] women are potters. Although the Falasha are localized in several regions, they nowhere constitute a majority
[361] of an area's residents. Like the Abyssinian Muslims, they reside either in hamlets of their own, apart from Amhara, or in peripheral homesteads of otherwise Christian hamlets. These distributions are summarized in Map2.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

*793 capital) and the parishes. The social identity of the
*793 parish tends to be defined in terms of the ties linking
794 its residents to the parish church. The church must be provided with sufficient clergy for the performance of the weekly Mass, as well as Masses on feast days and on occasions which mark a sacrament of the Church. This amounts to perhaps three Masses every week, each of which must be conducted by at least two priests (keys) and three deacons (diyakon). Ideally, these ecclesiastics are recruited from among the parish's risteñas, in return for the use of fields belonging to the parish church.
[776] The tie between residents of a parish and its eponymous church is further strengthened by the tendency of these people to confine their public ritual performances to the church, to favor the church's saint (reified in the arc, tabot) with private appeals for protection against illness and other misfortunes, to donate gifts to it when such appeals have been answered, to bury their dead in its churchyard, to pay towards the salary of a church teacher (astemariy) of the syllabary, and perhaps for a teacher (memher) of advanced Church subjects as well, and, lastly, to contribute in tithes (generally cereals and other foodstuffs) and labor towards the proper maintenance of the church.

• 443 Parish and Town. The highland zones can be conceptualized as a series of overlapping market spheres, each
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12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

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632 centered in a town and extending outward to include those areas from which peasants come to buy and sell.
[132] The size of the town's sphere contracts and expands sea-
[484] sonally, reaching its nadir furing the rainy season, when overland travel becomes difficult owning to deep mud and raging torrents. Then, travelling is infrequent and confined to the market town closest to a peasant's home parish. Although market trips are more frequent during the remainder of the year, most terminate at the closest market. These relatively short trips are favored when grain is brought to the mills located on the periphery
[796] of most market sites. The spheres of the larger towns (Gondar, Debre Tabor, Dabat) reach maximum size on the market days which preceed the great celebrations of the Coptic Church---Meskal (which celebrates the discovery of the True Cross, and follows the end of the rains), Michaelmas (November), Timkat (feast of the Epiphany, and preceeding the Lenten fast), and Easter. Map 3 indicates the extreme limits for market spheres of the towns of the Begemder highlands.

[491] The highland market towns are strung along the province's only all-weather motor road.[14] Each offers a

[648] [14]This road, built during the Italian occupation (1936-1941), runs north to Asmara (capital of Eritrea) and (since the 1960's) south to Addis Ababa (the national capital). A dry season road links the highland towns to Metemma on the Sudan border.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

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632 once-weekly market, staggered, so that the market days of over-lapping spheres do not coincide. Peasant exchange at these markets tend to be "sectional" in character; that is to say, producer-sellers bring regional specialties (such as cotton and high quality cayenne from kola lands; cereals, fresh vegetables, and livestock from highland farms), or occupational specialties (such as Falasha iron mongery and pots; the leather goods of the Fakiy, a largely endogamous artisan group). In addition to local products, peasants come to purchase imported goods (especially clothing) and the produce of distant parts of the Empire (such as salt bars from the Danakil Depression). The market is also the peasant's tie to the world market, to which he sends cattle and cattle hides.

The large market towns, with their numerous consumer crowds, offer important economic inducements to
[275] the peasant marketeer. Beyond these economic functions,
[548] the large town offers diversions and attractions unavailable in the peasant's home parish---exotic surroundings, the temporary fellowship and entertainment of beer houses and mead halls, and the sexual companionship of the town's numerous prostitutes.

632 The town also attracts peasant visitors on matters
796 unrelated to the market place. The monthly feast days of various saints of the Coptic Church are occasions for special celebrations, and these attract peasants, out of

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

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632 of the town's total population, support themselves by
433 working among the densely packed rows of beer houses
463 and mead halls which are found along the approaches to, and in the vicinity of, the arada, the weekly market area. A portion of these women alternate periods of beer selling with work as servants in Amhara households.

632 Gondar's Muslims include both Abyssinians (pejora-
779 tively, "Jabartiy", "half-caste") and Arabs. While the
563 former are mono-lingual Amharic speakers and physically
[197] indistinguishable from Amhara, the latter are distinc-
[167] tively dressed, bilingual in Amharic and Arabic, often
[142] light-skinned, and either immigrants from South Arabia or the descendants of immigrants and their Abyssinian
[443] wives. Arab men are the town's most affluent merchants
[442] (who often make a weekly circuit of provincial markets with their goods), shop-keepers, and wholesalers. Arab women are secluded at home. In the main, Gondar's Muslims are residentially nucleated in Addis Allem, a settlement on the town's southern perimeter and contiguous to the arada.

632 A substantial number of Tigrinya-speaking people,
563 predominantly Eritrean, live in Gondar. The men are
463 employed mainly as artisans (carpenters, masons, sandal
[197] makers, tailors, tinkers), laborers, and ecclesiastics.
[562] Because of their relative sophistication, Eritrean women are popular servants for affluent townsmen, and as